

School calendar Q & A

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SUPERINTENDENT

I have had several conversations with parents and community members who wonder about aspects of the school calendar this year. In attempt to respond to what might be questions that many people may have, I am pleased to discuss the most often asked questions this year. If you would like to comment on any of the issues below, do not hesitate to contact me at abent@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us

1. Why do we start school at the end of August? The school year for students is 182 days. Interspersed among those days are four days for professional development days for teachers and the various holidays. We need to start before Labor Day each year in order to avoid having school any later in June than is currently the case.

2. Why is our school year 182 days? Isn't the requirement 180? The requirement is for 180 days of school. Several years ago, we increased our school year by two days in order to address the ever-expanding demands made upon

teachers and students. Simply stated, we have set a higher standard than many communities (and our results show it). There are other communities as well, however, that have extended the school year beyond the minimum.

I am pleased to discuss the most often asked questions this year.

3. There were many interruptions this fall. Can we do something about it? We traditionally have two of the professional development days for teachers in the early part of the year. We will review our schedule for professional development as we plan for 2002-03. There will also be one fewer fall holiday next year.

4. Can the professional development days be scheduled at the beginning or end of the year? We have discussed this issue at length. Professional development just before the beginning of the school year has been less successful than the current model because teachers and administrators are very focused

on opening the schools and getting ready for the students. Professional development days at the end of the year have very limited value because teachers have no opportunity to apply their learning until the start of the next school year. (They, too, are ready for vacation.)

5. Will there be changes in next year's calendar? It is possible that some changes will be implemented. One issue that we face is the opening of the new high school and its availability to us in the summer. We are counting on having the school ready for students for the opening of the 02-03 school year. As the winter months unfold, we will be in a better position to judge with certainty.

The School Committee, however, is likely not to vote the school calendar for next year until March. The previous questions hint at other possibilities. There are options open to us as we plan for next year. Don't hesitate to communicate with me if you have an idea. In the meantime, parents should postpone making final vacation commitments until the calendar is adopted.

Facility use policy updated

DEBORAH PEEPLES
& KRISTINA PALOMBA
SCHOOL COMMITTEE MEMBERS

After a six-month review and public comment period, the School Committee voted in October to update its policy on Use of School Facilities. The policy pertains to the after hours use of school buildings by school-related groups, community groups, for-profit groups, and summer camps.

In the policy the School Committee reinforces its philoso-

phy that school buildings are a community asset and encourages their use by recognized community groups.

A new fee structure and classification of groups was integrated into the policy update. Policies and fee structures in other Massachusetts communities were analyzed as part of this updating process. The group classifications and fees are noted below.

- Additional charges may apply depending on the event. Group B organizations may use designated classroom space without charge

from 4-6pm, Monday through Friday provided normal custodial service is on duty. Organizations must call ahead to make reservation for free use.

- School facilities and equipment are not rented to individual citizens.

The full text of the policy, group classifications, regulations for use, and fee structure are available in a brochure at the Central Office, located in Town Hall.

The contact for making reservations is Kelly Donahue at 841-8400.

Fee & Classification Chart		
Group	Description	Fees
Group A	Recognized school-related groups	No charges
Group B	Non-profit groups (Shrewsbury-based)	• \$35/hour
Group C	For-profit groups and non-profit groups not based in Shrewsbury	• \$70/hr. for classrooms • \$200/hr. for gym, cafe, or auditorium
Group D	For profit camps	10% of gross revenue

On being the new kid on the block

Winship, from page 4

Many of the forums are work sessions, but some are more celebratory in nature, such as recognition of teacher professional status or the SHS Honors Night. These types of events keep bringing home to me that our students and faculty make a great team which is accomplishing so much. I am so thankful that our district has such a strong foundation which allows us to focus on refining our strengths and enhancing our programs.

As many of you, I had previously heard some talk regarding a lack of honest debate among the School Committee members. To the contrary, I have experienced a healthy amount of opposing views among my fellow committee members. Each of us comes to our work from

very a different background, but this allows us to learn from one another. Frankly, much of the work that we do, that you see or hear of, is review and approval of rather non-controversial subjects, be they within controversial areas. Opportunities for larger issues aren't frequent, but numerous small considerations abound. On the more debatable matters, we reach consensus far short of open warfare.

I have learned that the responsibilities and expectations of our teachers are enormous, and we must be realistic about the time required for them to reach optimal performance on new concepts in education. There is not a single individual in professional education today who was drawn to the classroom by the goal of high scores on

the MCAS or other high stakes testing. They became teachers to simply have children, adolescents or young adults develop skills and gain knowledge through their personal efforts. Parents seek advantage for their children, and I believe that it is possible for our students to gain advantage within our district because our teachers are well prepared, focused and determined to see our children succeed.

It is about the children of this community, about making wise spending decisions with taxpayer funds on matters of curriculum, policy and leadership. Of course, the rewards are as numerous as each child, teacher and parent with whom I am fortunate to interact. Ultimately, there is nothing really easy about this School Committee role, but it feels like the right thing to do.

Manuals created

Manuals, from page 2

Student & Staff Rosters: The need for complete and accurate information on the students and staff from each building is critical, especially in the event the school needs to be evacuated. This information will include name, address, telephone and emergency contact information. In addition, the manual will be updated daily with a listing of students and staff that are absent. Presently, the Fire Department has been provided with a list of those students and staff who are disabled and would need assistance in the event the building needed to be evacuated. This information will also be maintained in the manual.

Emergency Evacuation Site: Some crisis situations may require total evacuation of a school building. Each school has a process in place to move students and staff to an evacuation site if the emergency warrants such action.

Fire Alarm Evacuation Procedures: While each school has a number of fire alarm drills during the year which are supervised by the Fire Department, the procedures will also be included in the manual.

Other sections planned for the manual include Emergency protocol for activating a 911 call to Police and Fire departments; hospital information and directions to the University of Massachusetts Medical Center; general emergency and health guidelines; information dealing with critical incident stress debriefing.

As the plans are finalized the manuals will also be reviewed with both the Chief of Police and the Fire Chief. At the November 28th School Committee meeting the administration presented an update to the School Committee on the development of the crisis response manuals.

Plans are also being prepared to develop procedures to keep parents informed in the event of an emergency situation, including an incident that may require transporting students home prior to the normal dismissal time.

The district anticipates finalizing the crisis response manuals in the coming weeks.

Substitute teachers needed

The district is seeking individuals to serve as substitute teachers at the various levels (elementary, middle and high school). Substitute teachers are required to hold a Bachelor's Degree.

Previous teaching experience and teacher certification, while desirable, are not required. We can accommodate schedules for people who may only be available 1-2 days per week as well as those who can work on a regular basis. Compensation is \$60 per day. If you are interested in serving as a substitute teacher but would like to receive additional information you are invited to a substitute teaching informational session to be held on Tuesday, January 8 at 9:30 am in the Selectmen's Room at Town Hall. Applications for substitute teaching are also available on a regular basis from the School Department's Office in Town Hall.

